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The Two 'Moralities' of Joseph Conrad

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'A MAN of formed character', is how Conrad described himself in a letter. 'Certain conclusions remain immovably fixed in my mind, but I am no slave to prejudices and formulas, and I shall never be.' To the formation of these conclusions went a keen awareness of obligations on both the public and private planes of existence. As a Pole, an inhabitant of that country which, in 1916, existed for him as 'a spiritual entity as definitely as it ever existed in her past', he was intensely conscious of his incorporation in the Western tradition:

Nothing is more foreign than what in the literary world is called Sclavonism, to the Polish temperament with its tradition of self-government, its chivalrous view of moral restraints and an exaggerated respect for individual rights: not to mention the important fact that the whole Polish mentality, Western in complexion, had received its training from Italy and France and, historically, had always remained even in religious matters, in sympathy with the most liberal currents of European thought.

(Author's Note in *A Personal Record*.)

Thus his awareness, as an expatriate, of being 'outside the organized scheme of society' carried with it the compensation of a peculiar susceptibility to any order of communal life which would reinvoke the moral sanctions of his Polish childhood:

An impartial view of humanity in all its degrees of splendour and misery together with a special regard for the rights

of the unprivileged of this earth, not on any mystic ground but on the ground of simple fellowship and honourable reciprocity of services, was the dominant characteristic of the mental and moral atmosphere of the houses which sheltered my hazardous childhood — matters of calm and deep conviction both lasting and consistent, and removed as far as possible from that humanitarianism that seems to be merely a matter of crazy nerves or a morbid conscience.
(Author's Note in *A Personal Record*.)

This order of communal life, this manifestation of what he implied by the Western spirit at its best, he found, of course, in the loyalties and ethos of the British Merchant Service. The life of the ship made overt and defined demands on the individual, afforded a vital, external, stabilizing force, by submission to which it was possible to achieve a measure of self-fulfilment. It introduced him to a community of men 'worthy of (his) undying regard'.

The exacting life of the sea has this advantage over the life of the earth, that its claims are simple and cannot be avoided.

(*Chance*.)

All this, of course, is commonplace in the criticism of Conrad. Nevertheless, it is necessary to recall Conrad's view of the particular morality of the life at sea. It comprised something more than a day-to-dayness of living, though, of course, it was that too: 'He who loves the sea loves also the ship's routine.' 'There is health in it, and peace, and satisfaction of the accomplished round,' something, in fact, which recalls the old rural satisfactions as depicted in George Bourne's *Change in the Village*. For it also involved a moral obligation:

A Ship is a creature which we have brought into the world, as it were, on purpose to keep us up to the mark. In her handling a ship will not put up with a mere pretender, as, for instance, the public will do with Mr. X, the popular statesman, Mr. Y, the popular scientist, or Mr. Z, the

popular — what shall we say? — anything from a teacher of high morality to a bagman — who have won their little race.

(*The Mirror of the Sea.*)

(The contrast with the looser morality of the larger social world is worth noting.) And the spiritual lesson lies in the forgetting of self:

To forget one's self, to surrender all personal feeling in the service of that fine art, is the only way for a seaman to the faithful discharge of his trust. . . .

(*The Mirror of the Sea.*)

There is the spiritual fulfilment of good work:

From the hard work of men are born the sympathetic consciousness of a common destiny, the fidelity to right practice which makes great craftsmen, the sense of right conduct which we call honour, the devotion to our calling and the idealism which is not a misty, winged angel without eyes, but a divine figure of terrestrial aspect with a clear glance and with its feet resting firmly on the earth on which it was born.

('Tradition': reprinted in *Notes on Life and Letters.*)

Indeed, 'for the great mass of mankind the only saving grace that is needed is steady fidelity to what is nearest at hand'. And the art of the sailing ship involves the 'artistic quality of a single-handed struggle with something much greater than yourself'.

Such a code of conduct, then, did much to form that intimate self which Conrad brought to his day-by-day routine of authorship:

I have carried my notion of good service from my earlier into my later existence. I, who have never sought in the written word anything else but a form of the Beautiful — I have carried over that artistic creed from the decks of ships to the more circumscribed space of my desk.

(A Familiar Preface to *A Personal Record.*)

The world of the ship and that of the desk, indeed, shared a common precision:

... the man who watches the growth of the cable — a sailor's phrase which has all the force, precision, and imagery of technical language that, created by simple men with keen eyes for the real aspects of the things they see in their trade, achieves the just expression seizing upon the essential, which is the ambition of the artist in words.

(*The Mirror of the Sea.*)

This, indeed, invokes something rather less than the picture of Syngé listening to the peasants through a crack in the floor; nevertheless, it indicates a source of the writer's exactitude. Moreover, Conrad found in the English language a mode of expression which was in particular accord with his temperament:

... a subtle and unforeseen accord of my emotional nature with its genius ... You may take it from me that if I had not known English I wouldn't have written a line for print, in my life,

(Letter to Hugh Walpole, June 7th, 1918.)

albeit he had to 'work like a coal miner in his pit quarrying all (his) English sentences out of a black night'. This, too, then, provided him with a measure of integration, an awareness of being within a certain tradition, a sense of spiritual accord between himself and something outside himself.

Such was what the concrete 'public' morality, the 'Western' spirit of the British Merchant Service implied to Conrad ... a transcendence of self; and most of the tales of the sea exist in terms of a public code of conduct which is in accord with the private morality of the men involved. The 'simple fellowship and honourable reciprocity of service' Conrad found characteristic of the 'everlasting children of the mysterious sea'. One of the most perfect manifestations of its spirit is Captain MacWhirr in *Typhoon*. The incident of the lock — 'You can't trust the workman nowadays. A brand-new lock, and it won't

act at all. Stuck fast. See? See?" — is the concrete manifestation, the intimate symbol, of a harmony between the external 'facts' of the world he inhabits and the inner impulses of his egoism which, in the crisis of the storm, with the Chinese in turmoil below decks, produces the masterpiece of understatement: 'Can't have . . . fighting . . . board ship.'

Yet, of course, the ship as the 'moral symbol of our life' suffers a severe restriction of scope. Even here, the public and private moralities are not always so harmoniously balanced. Not all the seamen of the *Narcissus* are in such 'perfect accord' with their lives as Singleton shows himself to be. Donkin introduces a discordant note, and the Nigger himself is a source of corruption:

He was demoralizing. Through him we were becoming highly humanized, tender, complex, excessively decadent; we understood the subtlety of his fear, sympathized with all his repulsions, shrinkings, evasions, delusions — as though we had been over-civilized, and rotten, and without any knowledge of the meaning of life . . . He influenced the moral tone of our world.

'The latest egoism of tenderness of suffering' is at work. 'In the presence of the 'over-civilized and rotten' we are made aware of the private world, the self, and of its latent corruptions, a self which is out of harmony with the public demands of good craftsmanship. Thus, even on board ship, subtle self-consciousnesses threaten the harmony of training and command. In *The Shadow-Line* the insidious diseases of the calm threaten the stability of the ship's order:

I suppose the trouble is that the ship is still lying motionless, not under command; and that I have nothing to keep my imagination from running wild amongst the disastrous images of the worst that may befall us,

considers the young captain. And in a larger world which was very far from being 'under command', the possible corruptions to be faced were infinitely greater. After all, the world

of the ship was a very restricted one; the conception of the seamen as 'children', the essentially 'simple' nature of their beings, implied the limited applicability of a code whose perfect incidence depended on such unselfconsciousness.

Conrad's moral order, then, faced a double threat; one sprang from the incomplete affinity of the more self-conscious individual to its too limited demands, 'the uneasy doubt up-rising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm, and more chilling than the certitude of death — the doubt of the sovereign remedy enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct' (*Lord Jim*). The other arose from the fact that the ordinary social world, the complex life of Western social existence (the irony of its 'progress', the corruptions of its civilization) contained within itself no overt and acceptable moral standards other than those which could be taken over from the restricted life of the ship. The exploitation of the natives in the *Heart of Darkness*, the 'close-meshed net of crime and corruption' which 'lay upon the whole country' in *Nostromo*, the sordid and disreputable secret life of London in *The Secret Agent* all point to a decaying moral order. Hence the need to consider the moral order *within* the self, involving a different scale of 'respectabilities' which spring from the recognition of an imposed isolation and of the necessary force of egoism in a morally incoherent world.

Thus, when approached by his friend, Cunninghame Graham, to play some part at a 'peace' meeting, Conrad's rejection is unequivocal: 'I am not a peace man, not a democrat . . . *L'idée démocratique est un très beau phantome*' (February 8th, 1899). He could not take the idea of fraternity seriously:

Franchement, what would you think of an attempt to promote fraternity amongst people living in the same street? I don't even mention two neighbouring streets? Two ends of the same street.

There is already as much fraternity as there can be — and that's very little and that very little is no good. What does fraternity mean? Abnegation — self-sacrifice means something. Fraternity means nothing unless the Cain-Abel business. That's your true fraternity. *Assez*.

L'homme est un animal méchant. Sa méchanceté doit être organisée.

Le crime est une condition nécessaire de l'existence organisée. La société est essentiellement criminelle, — ou elle n'existerait pas. C'est l'égoïsme qui sauve tout, — absolument tout, — tout ce que nous abhorrons, tout ce que nous aimons. Et tout se tient. Voilà pourquoi je respecte les extrêmes anarchistes. — 'Je souhaite l'extermination générale.' Très bien. C'est juste et ce qui est plus, c'est clair. On fait des compromis avec des paroles. Ça n'en finit plus. C'est comme une forêt où personne ne connaît la route. On est perdu pendant que l'on crie: 'Je suis sauvé.'

'It is egoism which redeems everything'; and Conrad's egoism was bound up with another principle of conduct than that offered by the current democratic order:

Non. Il faut un principe défini. Si l'idée nationale apporte la souffrance et son service donne la mort, ça vaut toujours mieux que de servir les ombres d'une éloquence qui est morte, justement parce qu'elle n'a pas de corps.

He was thus peculiarly aware of the need for a self-assertion which carried with it no answering reciprocity in the world outside himself. It is not, he states, that he is indifferent to what interests Graham:

Seulement mon intérêt est ailleurs, ma pensée suit une autre route, mon cœur désire autre chose, mon âme souffre d'une autre espèce d'impuissance. Comprenez-vous? Vous qui dévouez votre enthousiasme à la cause de l'humanité, vous comprendrez sans doute pourquoi je dois, — j'ai besoin, — de garder ma pensée intacte comme dernier hommage de fidélité à une cause qui est perdue. C'est tout ce que je puis faire. J'ai jeté ma vie à tous les vents du ciel, mais j'ai gardé ma pensée. C'est peu de chose, — c'est tout, ce n'est rien, — c'est la vie même.

The ordinary standards of hope and regret had no reference to the situation in which he found himself, could find no outlet in the normal expectations of society. They only made sense in relationship to a certain purity of motive within himself and to the acceptance of the logic inherent in such a situation:

Je ne regrette rien — je n'espère rien, car je m'aperçois que ni le regret ni l'espérance ne signifie rien à ma personnalité. C'est un égoïsme rationnel et féroce que j'exerce envers moi-même. Je me repose là-dedans. Puis, la pensée revient. La vie recommence, les regrets, les souvenirs et un désespoir plus sombre que la nuit.

We become aware, then, in the work of Conrad of the co-existence of two 'moralities': that derived from a simple tradition of 'Westernness' which still served, in the total scheme of things, to validate a limited 'placing' of the characters; and that derived from an awareness of the force, and indeed, necessity of 'égoïsme' in a decaying order which contained within itself no general principle of moral being to cope with the profounder metaphysical apprehensions of highly self-conscious individuals.

The co-existence of these two worlds we see developing in Conrad's handling of his themes and characters. In *Lord Jim* we are already beginning to examine the morality of a private world, though the problem Jim has to face is one that has its roots in the public obligation of the officer of a ship. Jim's private morality, his 'egoism', is in accord with his sense of broken obligation; and, indeed, as Marlow makes clear, his worth as an individual consists precisely in his unwillingness, his inability to forget this 'fidelity to a certain standard of conduct . . . The thing is that in virtue of [this] feeling he mattered.'

He was — if you allow me to say so — very fine; very fine — and very unfortunate. A little coarser nature would not have borne the strain; it would have come to terms with itself — with a sigh, with a grunt, or even with a guffaw; a still coarser one would have remained invulnerably ignorant and completely uninteresting.

Jim himself feels that to keep touch with those who have lived honourable lives, it is necessary for him to

go on for ever holding up my end, to feel sure that nothing can touch me. I must stick to their belief in me to feel safe. . . .

Thus, Jim, in abandoning his ship, abrogates at once the moral order of honourable service and the moral possibilities of his own nature. If the moral possibilities are the real subject of the book, the treatment ranges within the moral atmosphere created by his act of desertion; and, at the end, by facing death Jim is at once obeying the call of his own 'exalted egoism' and remaining true to a 'shadowy ideal of conduct'. The 'egoism' involves the predicament of a 'romantic' nature which finds little real integration except in loyalty to a dispersed body of men who share a similar tradition, and to the finer impulses of itself. The central theme of the book is developed in Stein's advice:

In the destructive element immerse . . . That was the way.
To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream — and
so — *ewig* — *usque ad finem*.

One must, then, accept and *face* the moral implications of one's own self. Paradoxically, this is also seen as necessitating the immersion in a 'destructive element'; and there is the equivocation of Marlow's comment:

There were his fine sensibilities, his fine feelings, his fine longings — a sort of sublimated, idealized selfishness.

This is the unresolved irony of a necessity imposed in a society which recognizes no such sacrifice, where 'following the dream' is both a necessity and an illusion. One is aware that, for Jim to make his sacrifice, he has had to leave

. . . the living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with
a shadowy ideal of conduct.

Such behaviour, in this world of moral ambiguities, where such ideals of conduct are at once intensely real and 'shadowy', involves its author in its own equivocal reality; so that Jim is at once vividly present and an illusion. Marlow several times stresses his inability to 'see' Jim; and after his death speaks of him in these terms:

Now he is no more, there are days when the reality of his existence comes to me with an immense, with an overwhelming force; and yet upon my honour there are moments too when he passes from my eyes like a disembodied spirit astray among the passions of the earth, ready to surrender himself faithfully to the claim of his own world of shades.

Thus one sees Conrad in this novel facing simultaneously the problem of a public code of conduct which has lost its universal applicability (in that, for instance, the other officers of the ship who deserted are quite untouched by its exactions) but which maintains a 'shadowy' demand on finer natures; and the problem of an 'egoism' which can only find peace and integration in terms of its own romanticism, where there is little other moral compulsion than that which comes from *inside* itself.

The framework in *Lord Jim* is, however, a comparatively simple one; the nature of the evil to be faced is something which still maintains an overt, if limited, public manifestation. In the *Heart of Darkness* the relation of evil to the moral self, this time in a society hopelessly corrupt, is examined more fully. The infinite debasement of the African scene is conveyed in the ironic contemplation of its 'progress'; the futile warship popping shells into the jungle, the exploitation of the negroes. The focus of interest is on Marlow, who is telling the story, and who comes to realize an order of reality which transcends that of ordinary good workmanship, of honest reciprocity of services. The latter is represented in the finding of Towson's *Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship*. Momentarily,

the simple old sailor, with his talk of chains and purchases made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come across something unmistakably real.

What in the *Inquiry* is 'real' is an 'honest concern for the right way of going to work'; and such a concern is one way in which to find the self. As Marlow says: •

No, I don't like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don't like work — no man does — but I like what is in the work — the chance to find yourself. Your own reality — for yourself, not for others — what no other man can ever know.

But there is a deeper reality which the seamanship involved in the journey up the Congo (now a mere 'incident of the surface') only serves to hide temporarily:

When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality — the reality, I tell you — fades. The inner truth is hidden — luckily, luckily.

The use of the word 'real' in both contexts is more than accidental; it involves the awareness of the two orders of reality, one of public obligation, the other of private, metaphysical horror, the possible corruptions of the self; and the one has little relevance to the other. What is involved is the need to find the self in a world which exists beyond the simple moral issues invoked in Towson's book: 'The most you can hope from (life) is some knowledge of yourself', considers Marlow. This moral problem of the deeper self in its isolation is one that Marlow realizes through his contact with Kurtz.

Kurtz is hopelessly corrupt; he is the victim of a 'flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly'. Yet by his final cry expressing an appreciation of the truth of his own naked self (which has no reference to any public code), Kurtz achieves at least a measure of redemption. Although in terms of the public standard the wilderness 'finds out' Kurtz by whispering to him 'things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude', his final cry is represented as an 'affirmation, a moral victory', and makes him 'remarkable' even though it has been paid for by 'innumerable defeats'. For his cry, 'the horror', was the expression of,

some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpse of truth.

Thus, for those more complex souls who cannot contain themselves within the simple moral scheme implied by good work and its possibilities of integrating the self, who appreciate life as this 'mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose', the resolution must be on a different plane of 'reality'. By the final exercise of what can almost be called an '*égoïsme rationnel et féroce*' Kurtz achieves this knowledge of himself, and his last stare,

that could not see the flame of the candle, . . . was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness.

Because of this affirmation, Marlow comes to feel a sense of affinity which calls itself 'loyalty', an affinity that binds those who have searched the most secret places in the self. After this, Marlow's sight, in the 'sepulchral city', of the 'commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety', so as to 'filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams', is looked upon as a 'trespass', an offence.

Thus one seeks a self-knowledge in terms of which there is no answering reciprocity in the sanctions of the everyday social world even when represented at its best, as in the ship; though, of course, the values of the ship still retain some, if a necessarily restricted, validity. And so, Conrad comes to treat of two orders of morality, the morality of a certain order of public obligation, which is yet inadequate to cover those complexities of the inner life for which society maintains no standard of judgment, and the morality of the self in isolation following its egoism, at best striving to find some coherence in itself, so often, however, the victim of its own inner compulsions. In his more hopeless moods, the following of internal promptings in face of an ultimate unreality was, to Conrad, all that the self-conscious predicament of man permitted:

We can't return to nature, since we can't change our place in it. Our refuge is in stupidity, in drunkenness of all kinds,

in lies, in beliefs, in murder, thieving, reforming, in negation, in contempt — each man according to the promptings of his particular devil. There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope: there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that, whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror, is always but a vain and floating appearance. *Ote-toi de là que je m'y mette* is no more of a sound rule than would be the reverse doctrine. It is however much easier to practise.

(Letter to Cunninghame Graham, January 31st, 1898.)

At best, as he states in a letter to H. G. Wells: 'An enlightened egoism is as valid as an enlightened altruism — neither more nor less.'

We are aware of the workings of this double moral standard in, for instance, *The Secret Agent*. The public world of this novel is squalid, reveals a lack of co-ordinating principles. Most of the misunderstandings among the characters spring, not from a redeemable inability to live up to a certain standard of rational and humane conduct from which departure, however prevalent, is none the less regarded as an aberration, but from the fact that the various characters exist so much inside their own egos and their attendant activities (whether of policemen or anarchist, for instance) through which they find self-expression, that they have no common meeting-ground. Normally, in his letters, Conrad is not highly revealing about his work. It is therefore the more remarkable that he should make several references to the Professor of this novel. The Professor is the extreme anarchist whose whole life is bound up with the discovery of the perfect detonator. In the letter to Cunninghame Graham, it will be remembered, Conrad says that he 'respects extreme anarchists' because at least they posit a self-consistent world. ("*Je souhaite l'extermination générale.*" *Très bien. C'est juste et ce qui est plus, c'est clair.*') He also makes an explicit commentary on the Professor in another of his letters:

... as regards the Professor, I did not intend to make him despicable. He is incorruptible at any rate. In making

him say: 'Madness and despair — give me that for a lever and I will move the world', I wanted to give him a note of perfect sincerity. At the worst he is a megalomaniac of an extreme nature. And every extremist is respectable. (Letter to Cunninghame Graham, October 7th, 1907.)

Judged by any standard of society, certainly by that of 'simple fellowship', the Professor is morally nihilistic; judged by the accord of his temperament with his outlook and behaviour, he is 'respectable'. His life has a coherence and an order which is not the order of society but which creates its own sanctions.

Hence, Conrad, in his sensitivity to the nature of egoism, realizes the need to satisfy a force which, in a disintegrating society, necessitates its own additional moral criteria. Even where his disreputable characters are concerned, he is aware of the double nature of his moral comment. By the standard inherent in the sense of social obligation, Mr. Verloc in *The Secret Agent* is completely despicable; he is, like the other revolutionaries, the enemy of 'discipline and fatigue'; he has the air 'common to men who live on the vices, the follies, or the baser fears of mankind'. Nevertheless, such condemnation does not provide the only moral comment. Mr. Verloc's inner life of indolence is disrupted by the need to perpetrate an anarchist outrage, an event for which his nature has left him too little prepared. For Conrad informs us that Mr. Verloc's indolence springs from an impulse,

as profound as inexplicable and as imperious as the impulse which directs a man's preference for one particular woman in a given thousand.

Taken within the self-enclosed quality of his nature, his behaviour thus is seen to have a certain inevitability about it. His inability to understand the full force of his wife's affection for Stevie, and the effect that his death is likely to have on her is at once the sign of the public moral degradation of his marriage — 'Mr. Verloc loved his wife as a wife should be loved — that is, maritally, with the regard one has for one's

chief possession' — and the inevitable deduction from the inescapable elements of his own nature:

... he had come home prepared to allow every latitude to his wife's affection for her brother. Only he did not understand either the nature or the whole extent of that sentiment. And in this he was excusable, since it was impossible for him to understand it without ceasing to be himself.

Thus, Conrad shows his characters as being at once inside and outside the organized scheme of things. They are sufficiently inside for one to appreciate the condemnation of Mr. Verloc's laziness in terms of that 'discipline and fatigue' explicitly provided by Conrad's comment. Yet Conrad appreciates that a decayed moral order, such as he depicts in *The Secret Agent*, makes no demand on the individual in terms of which that individual can be helped to the transcendence of his own nature; as he implies in a sentence taken from *The Secret Sharer*, transcendence can only be in terms of that 'ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly'. Thus, in these great novels of Conrad's middle period, one is presented with a number of separate egoisms, acting on different assumptions about the nature of life in accordance with their temperaments, and often failing to understand one another because no common background of valuation enables them to communicate with one another, or even to guess at the motivations of each other. They can appreciate only what cuts across their particular line of behaviour: as the Assistant Commissioner, a born detective, understands Heat; as Mr. Verloc by a subtle affinity of moral outlook, appreciates the dangers of Vladimir; as the policeman and the burglar share a common set of assumptions. And, indeed, that 'resignation open-eyed, conscious and informed by love' with which Conrad claimed to have infused his work springs from a realization of men bound up in their own natures in a society which afforded them so little opportunity of transcendence except in terms of those very natures; thus, man was deserving of that ironical pity which Conrad could the more easily afford him because

of his detachment from an all-embracing moral criterion; to him, art . . . and life . . . consisted only of the

appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and the time.

(Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*.)

The increasing complexity of his technique, the attempt to see events through a variety of minds (the use of Marlow, for instance, or of the teacher of languages in *Under Western Eyes*) provided a mode of contemplation which stressed the importance of individual temperament and which worked through the juxtaposition of various points of view, rather than through an assured 'placing' on the part of the writer. Hence, Conrad did something to replace the older habit of seeing characters in relationship to a specific moral code by an attempt to display conduct through presented images, to show *how* people behaved:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you *see*. That — and no more, and it is everything. (Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*.)

Thus, as he said in one of his letters:

. . . the thought for effects is there all the same (often at the cost of mere directness of narrative), and can be detected in my unconventional grouping and perspective, which are purely temperamental and wherein almost all my 'art' consists. This, I suspect, has been the difficulty the critics felt in classifying it as romantic or realistic. Whereas, as a matter of fact, it is fluid, depending on grouping (sequence) which shifts, and on the changing lights giving varied effects of perspective.

(Letter to Richard Curle, July 14th, 1923.)

This awareness of the idiosyncratic importance of temperament

(talk about things 'as seen through your temperament' he tells a writer friend) runs through all his discussion of his own art and indicates the extent to which he felt the production of his books as a peculiarly *personal* thing . . . personal, that is to say, in the sense that he felt that his books involved the particular awareness of an isolated personality in its reaction to the passing scene. This is something different, in extent of contact and mutuality, from the direct moral purpose of, for instance, George Eliot:

If art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally. I have had heart-cutting experience that *opinions* are a poor cement between human souls: and the only effect I ardently long to produce is, that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring human creatures.

George Eliot writes as one who is still inside a coherent moral scheme; she appreciates that whatever may divide people, there is still between them a bond of understanding which can assist mutual comprehension. She does not see the art of fiction as the display of various temperaments on a single co-ordinating mind; she regards it as something capable of more directly modifying understanding, to an extent that modification of conduct is implied. In other words, there is a more specific moral purpose in George Eliot's writing than there is in Conrad's, and that because George Eliot is more aware of sharing certain assumptions with her readers. Conrad's preoccupation with Manner ('As the Frenchman said, "Il y a toujours la manière."') implies a more oblique influence, a less certain awareness of possible contact and influence as between writer and reader, springing from a profounder scepticism about the ultimate purposes of life. Of course, even in the manner, there was still the 'regard for one's own dignity which is inseparably united with the dignity of one's work'; art, that is to say, retains a moral implication. The specific training of the sailor of ships informs the work of the writer of tales, as we have seen;

but it is, symptomatically enough, a moral implication which springs from the dignity of self, truth to 'every sensation, every thought, every image, mercilessly, without reserve and without remorse'; in a word, to everything within the self, not truth to a moral ideal of didactic influence.

Conrad, indeed, reflects a particular stage in the disintegration of the moral order in the modern world — though because of his own integrity he did not degenerate into incoherence. One is at least aware of the firmness of his ironical contemplation. The 'certain moral scheme' of which Lawrence complained in Dostoevsky, and which Lawrence himself abandoned, yet maintained its restricted validity for Conrad. His grasp on the outer world is still sure; his people maintain coherent personalities; they do not perpetually modify one another in the constant flux of experience apart from fixed moral criteria, as do Lawrence's characters. In his later writings, Conrad is moving towards the idea of redemption through relationship; but relationship on any level of profundity is beyond his scope. What his characters really achieve through relationship is a deeper knowledge of themselves. Thus, Razumov, in *Under Western Eyes*, though claiming to have been brought to confession through Haldin's sister, is only brought to a fuller realization of himself: 'In giving Victor Haldin up it was myself, after all, whom I was betraying', he discovers. And it is a fuller realization of himself that Heyst, in *Victory*, attains: there is no deep reciprocity between him and Lena.

In Conrad, then, the two orders of 'reality', with their differing moralities, co-exist. He never completely throws over the best public morality at the behest of the private as did Lawrence; at the same time, he is intensely aware of a private order which is too subtle to be fitted into any restricted public scheme. Yet, though between two worlds, his particular contribution lies in the fact that he remained, in the sense that I have tried to define, true to both.